

**Statement of the Honorable Jason Buelterman, Mayor**  
**City of Tybee Island, Georgia**  
**Submitted to the House Appropriations Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development**  
**May 3, 2017**

Good morning. I want to start by thanking Committee Chairman Frelinghuysen, Subcommittee Chairman Simpson, and for all the members of the Subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today.

My appearance before you is to underscore the need for increased appropriations to the U.S. Corps of Engineers' investigations account, specifically the additional funding for "shore protection investigations" that the Committee has provided in the past. I want to use an example from my own city of Tybee Island to demonstrate what I believe is a pressing need for these funds across many coastal regions of the country.

For those who may not be aware, Tybee Island is a 3.5-mile-long barrier island located 18 miles east of Savannah, Georgia. It is the easternmost point in the state of Georgia and is known for being a popular recreational destination for the region as well as a vacation spot amongst tourists from outside the Savannah metropolitan area.

The sandy shoreline of Tybee Island is of significant value. While it is important to the City and the region as a recreational venue, its primary purpose is to provide safety in that it protects people and infrastructure against damages caused by storms and coastal flooding. Recently, the City of Tybee Island suffered significantly due to Hurricane Matthew. The total damage to Tybee Island amounted to at least \$3.4 million. Those damages would have been far greater had our Federal shore protection project not been in place.

The Tybee Island Shore Protection Project was authorized by Section 201 of Flood Control Act of 1965, Section 156 of WRDA 1976, Section 934 of PL-662 in 1986, and Section 301 (b)(4) and Section 506 of PL 104-303 in WRDA 1996. The Section 934 Report, approved by the Assistant Secretary of the Army in 1998, provided periodic nourishments, estimated to be every 7 years until the end of the 50-year project life in 2024.

The City of Tybee Island is working to extend the project's authorization and bolster its dune system. The Savannah District Office of the Corps, at the request of the City of Tybee Island, made a funding request for the President's FY'18 budget to fund Phase 2 of the Savannah Channel Impact Study. Phase 1 determined that over 73% of the erosion of the existing Federal project was caused by impacts from the Savannah Harbor Ship Channel. Under law, the Federal government is responsible for mitigating damages caused by its navigation projects. Phase 2 will determine what measures will be recommended to reduce the erosion. The study will be all-encompassing, including assessing adding dunes to the existing Federal shore protection project and extending that project to include the shoreline at the north end of the island.

The Phase 2 study will also assess the severe erosion that has occurred along the shoreline of the northern end of Tybee Island. This portion of the island, although it is adjacent to the ship channel, is not a part of the current Federal shore protection project. It has been severely impacted by ship

traffic using the Savannah Channel and will face even greater erosional impacts due to the Channel's ongoing deepening.

I urge the House Committee on Appropriations to provide sufficient funding under the Additional Funding – Shore Protection Investigations programmatic line to enable the funding of the Phase 2 study. We face stiff competition for funding because the overall Investigations budget of the Corps is lower than it was five years ago, while demands for feasibility studies, economic reevaluations, and the like have increased.

I also want to highlight another issue that I respectfully ask the Subcommittee to keep in mind as you determine future funding needs for shore protection projects. The lesson of major storms such as Hurricane Matthew and Superstorm Sandy is the amount of money that did not need to be spent in Federal post-disaster and flood damage costs due to the existence of man-made dunes. I've been told that dunes are the cheapest part of a beach nourishment project. Nevertheless, dunes are not a part of many older Federal shore protection projects, such as the one on Tybee Island, because at the time of the creation of the projects, dunes were not considered to be an essential protective measure for coastal communities.

I urge the Subcommittee to consider adding additional shoreline protection construction funding with the appropriate report language noting that a portion of the additional money is to be used to expedite adding a dune element to older projects using the existing cost-sharing percentages for those projects. If the Corps is required to produce a straightforward report on those projects designed prior to 1986 where dunes were not included in the project's design, you will see that Tybee Island is not alone.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today.